

2024 GSA General Election

CRO Decision in the Matter of Soumya Kulal and Saad Arslan Iqbal/Rija Kamran
Thursday, February 29th, 2024

A formal complaint was filed by Soumya Kulal, a candidate for the position of Vice-President Academic in the GSA General Election (hereafter "the Complainant"), against Saad Arslan Iqbal, a candidate for the position of Vice-President Student Services and Rija Kamran, a candidate for the position of Vice-President Academic (hereafter "the Respondents"), on Wednesday, February 28th, 2024.

Complaint: The Complainant alleges that the two Respondents are slating and provides evidence that one Instagram user who appears to be a mutual follower with both of the Respondents, has posted in their story: 2 reposts of Rija's posts and 1 picture of a physical paper of Saad. They note that these Instagram stories were up for 22 hours at the time. The Complaint states that "There is no point of them disowning the campaign volunteer as they are following each other which clearly shows slates passed."

Response: Rija provided evidence of her messaging several people who have shared her posts on their social media to ask them to remove their posts as it could be considered slating on their part. In these messages, she states that it is a CRO directive that they cannot support more than one candidate. She reminds the Instagram user in question to either remove the post supporting either her or Saad. Saad states that this Instagram user posted this without him knowing. He recalls meeting this person at an ISA event and handing them a flyer. He also states that he has encountered an instance of someone supporting more than one candidate, and he reached out to them to remind them about the rules surrounding this.

Relevant Bylaw and Policy:

I.POL.10.4 Candidates will campaign as individuals and may not serve as Campaign Volunteers for other candidates. Slates are not permitted.

"Campaign Volunteers" are defined as individuals or groups who campaign on behalf of a candidate with their awareness

Consultation with the Elections and Referenda Committee (ERC): Given the timeline of this complaint, the CRO provided ERC with the complaint only for consultation, and forwarded the responses as they were received. Members of ERC replied after they received the complaint but before receiving responses. ERC recommended penalties between 5-10% for both candidates. After the responses were received, the CRO recommended to ERC that they give leniency to the Respondents due to the circumstances, and members of ERC agreed to dismiss the complaint.

Decision: Earlier in this year's campaigning period, the CRO issued a directive that ERC passed on, that campaign volunteers can only be a volunteer for one candidate. If a campaign volunteer supported more than one candidate, ERC determined this situation to be considered slating. The CRO has also been in continuous conversations with all candidates, and answered several inquiries surrounding what constitutes a campaign volunteer, and included those who support the candidate in any way. At the All Candidates Meeting, the

CRO also reminded candidates to keep track of their campaign volunteers, and turn their notifications on so that if someone shares their posts on social media, they are aware. The Complainant's claims that the candidates following this Instagram user and vice versa does not imply slating. It is reasonable to assume that many candidates will follow each other on social media, and have mutual friends or acquaintances that they follow on social media, as we are all part of the same graduate student community.

Upon receipt of the complaint, it was clear that Rija would have received a notification of her posts being reposted on this Instagram user's story. However, upon receipt of Rija's response, it is undeniable that she made every effort to communicate to the Instagram user that they cannot support both her and Saad, and asked them to remove one of the posts. Therefore, no penalty is imposed on Rija, as she attempted to recite the situation, and the other user did not immediately comply, which she has no control over.

Upon receipt of the complaint, it was already evident that as this Instagram user did not share one of Saad's posts, but instead posted a picture of the flyer that Saad gave them. Although Saad does follow this user, it is unreasonable to assume that Saad would look at everyone's Instagram stories, and he could have been "unaware" that this person was acting as his campaign volunteer. Taking into account the definition of a campaign volunteer which requires the candidate to be "aware", this user cannot be taken to be one of Saad's volunteers. Therefore, no penalty is imposed on Saad.

In summary, this complaint is dismissed by the CRO.

Appeals: As per GSA Bylaw and Policy, "decisions of the CRO are subject to appeal to the GSA Appeals and Complaints Board (GSA ACB)" (Section I.POL.11.6) and "candidate(s) or referendum campaign member(s) have twenty-four (24) hours from the time the CRO's decision is deemed delivered to submit an Appeal (Section H.POL.15.2.b). "Deemed Delivered" is defined such that an email is deemed to have been delivered twenty-four (24) hours from the time it was sent (GSA Bylaw and Policy, Section H: Definitions).